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ABSTRACT

A case study analyzed a young organization to determine how the communicative acts of the general manager are primary in the creation of the company culture and how well interpretive methods contribute to research on organizational culture. The company investigated manufactures custom products, employs approximately 175 skilled craftsmen and support personnel, has one principal owner who is also the general manager, and is nonhierarchical. Data were gathered through participant observation, interviews of personnel (n=34), observation of the interactions of personnel, observation of the facilities, and thorough investigation of company documents. Based on two different interpretive methods, thematic interpretation of verbatim interview notes and interpretation of cultural performances, five major themes emerged: (1) organizational members were task oriented and focused most of their talk on improving the work itself; (2) the general manager's tight control of all managerial functions resulted in a lack of latitude in decision making by other company members; (3) the company, culture, and the people within it were vulnerable to environmental influences and the whims of major customers; (4) the lack of clearly defined roles and procedures resulted at times in a chaotic work environment; and (5) an atmosphere of blame was a visible element in the organizational culture. Knowledge gained by case studies can help identify problems intrinsic to small companies and provide solutions aimed at making the quality of life better for those who work in these organizations. (Eighteen references are attached.) (KEH)

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Application and Evaluation of Interpretive Methods in the Cultural Assessment of a Manufacturing Company

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Application and Evaluation of Interpretive Methods in the Cultural Assessment of a Manufacturing Company

Interpretive methods for the study of organizational culture have received much attention over the past several years. Although much conceptual work has been done on interpretive methodology, accounts of actual communication in organizations are rare (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983; Trujillo, 1985). Trujillo (1985) states, "if we are to shed any insight on the 'political, dramaturgical, and language skills' that organizational members require . . . then we must spend more time in organizations listening, recording and analyzing how managers and other members talk to each other in their everyday organizational lives" (p. 220).

In this paper, I summarize an interpretive case study of an organizational culture and evaluate the effectiveness of the interpretive methods used. The first segment of the paper is a brief literature review with sections on the major definitions, theories, goals and methods used in interpretive research on organizational culture. The next segment is a summary of an interpretive case study on a manufacturing company. The final segment is the evaluation of the interpretive methods used in the study.

Literature Review: Interpretive Methods in Research on Organizational Culture

Definition

There are many definitions of organizational culture. Frost and his colleagues (1985) define organizational culture as having "to do with shared assumptions, priorities, meanings, and values--with patterns of beliefs among people in organizations" (p. 17). The culture of an organization includes

organizational myths, stories, artifacts and products, architecture and office layout, performances by members, and documents such as mission statements and policy manuals. The following section is a summary of the interpretive approach in the study of organizational culture.

Interpretive Approaches

Recently, communication scholars have developed interpretive approaches similar to those used in anthropology and sociology. Many writers of interpretive theory consider culture not as something the organization has but as something the organization is. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) describe interpretive research by quoting Clifford Geertz, a seminal writer on interpretive methodology: "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun . . . culture [is] those webs, and the analysis of it [is] therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (p. 123). Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) add:

> And so our research consciously avoids evaluating one organizational culture in light of others (including our own), but rather seeks to understand the culture in terms of what it makes possible . . . as sense making, as a reality constructed and displayed by those whose existence is embedded in a particular set of webs . . . [also] As interpretation, an account of organizational culture begs not for an assessment of its reliability and validity, but for an assessment of its plausibility and its insight . . . . (p. 123)

Interpretive research seeks "thick description," stories that provide understanding of the deeper meaning of events and experience.

The interpretive approach is broad and consists of various methods and philosophies. As Strine and Pacanowsky (1985) state, "Some pieces of interpretive research strongly resemble traditional 'org comm' studies complete with numbers. But others look like critical analyses of plays, filled with indented dialogue. Still others resemble New Journalism or fiction" (p. 284). Overall, scholars use the interpretive approach to evoke insight into how communicative acts create culture. The focus is on the details of communication and culture. Participant observation and interviews are common methods of data collection.

Theorists of organizational culture (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983; Trujillo, 1985) developed an interpretive method using the metaphor of "cultural performance." In a cultural performance, the interpretive product is a written drama that gives insight into how communicative interactions create culture. Trujillo (1985) states that performances give the "'dramaturgical' and 'cultural' sense of those situationally variable interactions in which managers and other members construct senses of organizational identity and reality" (p. 201). Accounts of performances reveal communication as symbolic actions that both create and are a product of organizational culture. Inherent in the performance is the performer's identity and cultural function in the company.

Deetz (1982) describes a critical approach within interpretive methodology that focuses on texts of organizational communications such as verbatim notes of conversations and company handbooks. Language is central in this approach. Deetz states that "individual meanings are not primary but arise out from deeper meaning structures and that talk is

epistemic--knowledge is produced in talk, not simply transmitted and shared" (p. 133). He describes the goals of the critical approach within interpretive research as: "(1) richer understanding of naturally occurring events, (2) criticism of false consensus and the forces which sustain them, and (3) the expansion of the conceptual base from which organizational members think and work" (p. 137). Deetz' critical approach is rigorous, critical, and productive of a type of knowledge complementary to the knowledge generated through traditional research on organizations. The next section is a description of the goals of research in organizational culture.

Purposes of Research in Organizational Culture

Research on organizational culture has three purposes: 1) to develop knowledge about communication and culture in organizations; 2) to help organizations; and 3) to aid the working lives of people. All approaches to organizational culture focus on the development of knowledge and enlarge the scope of discourse on organizational communication.

Communication researchers often study organizations to intervene and help the client company become more effective. Problems can arise, however, with intentionally trying to change an organization's culture. Siehl (1985) describes some conditions for the management of organizational culture. According to Siehl, the best question is, "When and what aspects of culture can be managed?" (p. 126). She suggests the most promising times for the management of culture are during the periods of transition between three distinct developmental stages: 1) entrepreneurial; 2) creative; and 3) formalization and growth. Siehl suggests that during a transition stage, "employees themselves may feel a need for change from a culture based on entrepreneurial values to one based on values of long-term growth and

stability" (p. 127). In answer to the question of whether corporate cultures can be managed, Siehl concludes: 1) the answer is ambiguous; and 2) to the extent that conscious management of culture occurs, the process involves the participation of all personnel, not just management.

According to Strine and Pacanowsky (1985), interpretive approaches have humanistic intentions, "the increasing rationality of modern corporate bureaucracies wastes human talent and energy and . . . organizational life could be much richer and more rewarding than it is" (p. 290). Also, interpretive research is involved with an effort to understand organizational culture for its own sake rather than make the organization more efficient. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) state, "whereas the underlying motive of traditional research is coming to an understanding of how to make organizations work better, the underlying motive of the organizational culture approach is coming to understand how organizational life is accomplished communicatively" (p. 121).

In brief, conventional approaches such as communication audits aim to develop knowledge and help organizations through intervention. Interpretive research emphasizes the development of theoretical knowledge and humanistic insights.

General Criteria for Data Collection and Analysis in Interpretive Research

Criteria for interpretive research are poorly defined and vary with the methods employed (Strine and Pacanowsky 1985). Strine and Pacanowsky urge a narrative analysis of text with the criterion of textual authority. The textual authority or power is "the book's or essay's potential for promoting a credible and compelling view of organizational life" (p. 289). Strine and Pacanowsky give examples of sources of textual power such as sheer amount

of data, scientific method, and the imaginative influence of New Journalism and novels. The various sources of authority require different criteria for evaluation. Scientific methods require the criteria of validity and reliability, while literary methods require criteria such as the ability of dialogue to evoke the appropriate social experiences and understandings in the reader.

The researcher chooses the methods of data collection best suited to the particular case and research question. Interpretive research is flexible and focuses on discovery rather than on description (Albrecht and Ropp, 1982). Concerning the appropriateness of case-study methods compared to survey methods, Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) state, "First, survey methods cannot match the richness of detail that can be achieved via case study methods. Second, and even more of a problem, survey methods presume that we know what questions we want to ask before we go into the organization. The research task becomes essentially one of measurement, not of discovery" (p. 121). They continue, "What is required then are details--detailed observations of organizational members accounting for their actions . . . surveys that measure climate, networks, and so forth do not provide sufficient (nor the right kind of) detail for building a plausible interpretation of organizational sense-making" (p. 127).

The interpretive researcher faces a dilemma. Along with the values and attitudes consciously agreed upon by organizational members, there is a deeper level of causes that the researcher must understand. On the one hand, the researcher must be empathic and participate in the culture studied, while at the same time remaining naive and seeing behind the everyday assumptions of organizational members. In other words, participation tends to blunt the insight of the researcher; and, therefore, the participant observer

must strive to see the communicative causes behind the shared meanings of the group.

Deetz (1982) summarizes methodological guidelines for interpretive research as "the primacy of the object of analysis over preferred means of analysis and a set of principles to maintain this primacy" (p. 143). The interpretive researcher strives for extensive familiarity with detailed data. Through extensive familiarity and a variety of methods such as analytic induction and corroboration, the researcher develops results that are reasonable and applicable to the organization under study.

In summary, the interpretive approach examines the details of communication and discovers how people create culture in organizations. The next segment is the report of a case study on organizational culture.

Applying and Evaluating the Interpretive Approach in a Case Study

The extensive theoretical work done on organizational culture and interpretive methodology needs better grounding in actual case studies of organizations. In this case study, I apply the methods developed by communication scholars such as Deetz, Pacanowsky, Strine, and Trujillo and evaluate how well these methods accomplish the purposes of research on organizational culture.

Research Questions

There are two research questions in this study. One concerns the case study itself, and the other is an evaluation of the interpretive methods.

Question #1: How does the company's general manager create culture in this organization? From the data noted in observation of the company, a working hypothesis developed--that the communicative acts of the general manager

are primary in the creation of the company culture. This hypothesis is consistent with a body of literature describing the entrepreneurial nature of young companies (Siehl, 1985; Pettigrew, 1979). In young organizations, the founder or leader exerts extraordinary influence over the culture. Since the company in this case study is young, a working hypothesis was the central role of the company's leader in the creation of culture.

Question #2: How well do the interpretive methods used in this study accomplish the goals of research on organizational culture? This question examines the goals and purposes of research on organizational culture and the unique contribution of interpretive methods.

Subjects: The Company and its People

The company manufactures custom products and employs approximately 175 skilled craftsmen and support personnel. The organization produces custom products--mostly architectural fixtures and millwork. The products are transported among three different manufacturing plants, each at a different location in the same city. The communication network is very complex because a tremendous amount of information passes through the organization. All personnel engage in complicated decision and quality-control processes.

The organization has one principal owner, who is also the general manager. There are three minor partners--one president and two vice-presidents. The company tends to be nonhierarchical and structurally flat; there are very few levels of management.

The company has grown steadily since its founding in the 1940s. This growth is due largely to one major customer, who provides more than half of

its business. Presently, the organization can be typified as a fast-growth company experiencing changes.

Procedures

The research methods for this study were participant observation, interviews of personnel, observation of the interactions of personnel, observation of the facilities, and thorough investigation of company documents. I conducted a consulting engagement with the company for over seventeen months.

Over the 17-month period, I spent 32 days working inside the organization. In addition to formal interviews, observation throughout the company provided material for extensive field notes. Observations took place in various company offices, meetings, informal working lunches and so forth. Other participant observations included planning sessions for union contract negotiations and two complete walk-throughs of the company's three manufacturing plants. In addition to 196 hours of observation and interviews, I spent 600 hours researching company documents. Data included a comprehensive file provided by the general manager that contained a variety of documents such as policy and philosophy statements, rules, safety communications, memos and letters.

I interviewed 34 individuals who were either office personnel or production supervisors. Most of these individuals were interviewed more than once, and the total number of interviews was 56. The interviews were structured but flexible and lasted approximately 40 minutes. I recorded the subject's comments with hand-written notes.

In general, the interviews were structured with these questions:

1. What are the roles and positions within your department?

2. What help could you use to do your job better?
3. What would you most like your personnel to know?
4. What information do you need from other departments?
5. How is morale in your department?
6. Are there any other concerns that you have about communication and procedures within the company?

These interview questions are both open and closed ended. They provided important information about communication, the roles within the company, and organizational culture. A closed-ended question provides important details about the formal and informal relationships within the company. The open-ended questions elicit attitudes and beliefs about the company culture. The last question in the interview was more open ended and was followed up by questions intended to elicit the details of any critical incidents or concerns brought forward by the subject.

Two researchers analyzed the data. I worked inside the company collecting data, and another researcher was outside and never visited the organization. The outside researcher tried to make the analysis of data problematic and naive. Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) claim that inside-outside teamwork adds insight and helps to resolve the dilemma (or paradox) for the inside researcher who is both the involved participant and the naive "seeing" observer. Review and discussion of interview notes by the two researchers led to a consensus decision on a list of themes for each interview. The researchers made a master list of themes and analyzed this list to derive a summary of themes.

I took notes of critical incidents and conversations during the 196 hours spent in the company. The inside and outside researchers collaborated by reviewing management performances recorded in the field notes. We

selected two cultural performances to present in this paper. We used the criterion of representativeness--how strongly did a particular performance portray how communicative acts create culture in this organization? And, how compelling were these performances as expressions of organizational culture?

The research had several limitations. There was only one researcher inside the company and therefore no collaboration in data collection. The formal interviews were restricted to office personnel. Except for supervisors, plant personnel were not interviewed formally. Also, the subjects were not selected randomly from all levels and functions within the office. Subjects were the informal leaders of specific functions such as estimating, sales, purchasing and so on.

Interpretive Report

There are two different interpretive methods employed in this case study: 1) the thematic interpretation of verbatim interview notes; and 2) the interpretation of cultural performances. Discussion of each method appears in its own section.

Interpretative Method #1: Themes from Interview Notes

Five major themes emerged from the analysis of interview notes. A main subject in the interviews was the company's general manager (GM) and principal owner. The GM is approximately 46 years old and appears to control most of the important management decisions in the company. The five themes and examples of representative speech by office personnel during the interviews follow.

The first theme that emerged from the interviews was that organizational members are task oriented and focus most of their talk on improving the work itself. For example, an office manager stated, "If I were to suggest a motto for our department, it would be, 'Get the work done.'" When social issues were addressed, they generally were evaluated by statements about how the social issues related to the effectiveness of the company and task accomplishment. The behavior of the GM also corroborates the theme of task orientation. On many occasions, the GM's behaviors reaffirmed the overarching value of task accomplishment.

The second theme was that the GM's tight control of all managerial functions results in a lack of latitude in decision making by other company members. An example anecdote from an office manager is this: "We have no authority to hold our own meetings. We tried to have departmental meetings but the GM wanted to be there and that ruined it. He wants to have control in all areas of the company. When the company got too big for him to do it alone, he appointed the production supervisor to be his right-hand man." Most of the interview subjects including the GM corroborated this theme. The GM stated that he believes the leader of the company should to be involved at every level of the organization.

A third theme was openly acknowledged by everyone with whom I spoke: The company, culture and the people within it are vulnerable to environmental influences such as market conditions and the whims of their major customer. A minor owner of the company stated, "We are just a stepchild of _____ (tne name of its major customer). We have always followed their lead. Now they have a new CEO who is looking hard at costs, and we don't know what will happen." The company's financial figures also

document this theme. The organization's president and two vice-presidents have spent most of their time and careers working on this special account.

A lack of clearly defined roles and procedures was the fourth theme. This lack of formal organization results at times in a chaotic work environment. As representative comment was given by an office worker in charge of coordination, "I find it very frustrating that I do not know what my job description is . . . They just hand in the sales orders on odd pieces of scrap paper. When things get busy, morale falls very low, and we just can't bring it all together at the end of a job." The company has no job descriptions or formal procedures for performance appraisal. Major functional areas such as sales and estimation have no formal leadership.

Blame and consequent self-protective behavior by personnel are the fifth theme. An atmosphere of blame is a visible element in the organizational culture. According to an office worker, "The main thing going around here is blame. Before, they [owners] would come around and tell me that I should have done something when I already did it, but they lost the result. Now, I spend half my time making records of what I do just so my ass is covered." I asked other office personnel if this theme was true, and they answered that it was. Observation of behavior also corroborated this theme. The GM was quick to acknowledge verbally mistakes made by others. At times, the GM's assessment of what constituted a mistake appeared to be highly subjective and even erroneous. On one occasion, the GM gave his assessment of these events, "We have to keep people awake."

These five themes suggest major elements in the company culture. With the exception of theme number three, the company's heavy reliance on one customer, the interview themes relate to the central role played by the general manager. Notes taken during participant observation support the

proposition that the GM's interaction with personnel plays a major part in the development of each of the themes. The dominance of the organization's leader is a common situation for companies in what Siehl (1985) calls the entrepreneurial stage of organizational development. The entrepreneurial stage is an early stage before the company grows beyond simple control by the leader and becomes bureaucratic.

The inside and outside researchers analyzed the interview and observational notes for communication that disconfirmed these five interview themes. Some data appeared at first to disconfirm the negative aspects of some of the themes. Specifically, one office manager gave only positive comments. His comments were routinely supportive of the general manager and positive conditions in the company. Nonetheless, closer scrutiny showed that during the period of field work, this individual received a promotion. It is probable that he received the promotion because his behaviors were supportive of the GM. The promotion reinforced the power of the GM within the company. This apparently disconfirming behavior of the positive speaking manager, after closer investigation, actually supports the hypothesis of the GM's central role as creator of culture.

Interpretive Method #2: Cultural Performance

The cultural performances, as reported here, are rewritten from field notes taken during participant observation. In the first performance, the GM performs a walk-through of the main office and the company's three manufacturing plants. The walk-through begins in the main office and plant number one. As the GM looks around, he notices details. He picks at a padded chair left by a door to keep it ajar and asks a worker standing near, "We just bought this chair last year, how did it get a big rip in it?" The

worker says he doesn't know. As the GM approaches a group of workers, they all turn and smile. The GM walks up to an older, European-looking man and asks warmly, "How is Mama doing now?" The craftsman responds in a confidential tone, "She is doing better since the operation." After checking several details, the GM leaves the facility to visit another.

The GM walks through the second plant and knows most people's names. Each interaction begins with a smile or a joke. Then, the GM checks details and talks about the work in the plant. Later in the day, we visit plant number three, accompanied by a computer salesperson. As we complete the walk-through ritual and exit plant three, the workers leave the building to enjoy the sunshine for their afternoon break. They look at our car driving away, and their facial expressions say, "there go the management types." The GM gains their attention with his glance, looks down at his wrist, and taps his watch with an expression of concern. Everyone laughs. On the way back, I tell the GM, "I can see by the response of the personnel that they like you." He responds emphatically, "I like them, too."

In this performance, the GM expresses parts of his identity and cultural function in the company. An overriding theme is what Trujillo (1985) calls "identities of sociability" (p. 208). The GM is friendly and performs a role that creates a culture of friendliness conducive to company cohesiveness. His concern for the older worker's wife is an example.

The GM displays authority as he walks through the plant and picks on mistakes and neglect such as ripped upholstery on a chair. Here he performs what Trujillo (1983) labels "politics of authority." Personnel react to the GM's probing questions by sharing concern, denying their responsibility for mistakes, or taking action to correct problems. Another message in the GM's behavior is his concern for work. After the sociable joke and smile, he always

talks about the work at hand and the cultural values of paying attention to details and costs. He is not removed from work in the plants but participates in the activity of production. In this performance, he asserts his identity as the boss and models his values to company members.

The incident where the GM taps his watch as the workers begin to take their break provides comic relief and reinforces company values. This laugh shared by all implies a company value--a nonhierarchical, egalitarian attitude. The general manager tries to overcome the tendency for personnel to stratify between the office and the plants by involving everyone in a laugh. The shared laugh implies that although personnel have different functions, they are all part of the same team. The GM, who does not wear a tie or suit jacket, dresses closer to the style of production personnel and communicates a uniformity of status within the company.

The second cultural performance comes also from field notes and is a verbatim report of a conversation between the GM and an office worker. This conversation is included because it lends insight to the analysis of the other data offered in this report. This performance corroborates one of the themes emergent in the interview data--the theme of blame and consequent self-protective behaviors by personnel.

The GM and an office manager discuss policy for the installation segment of the company manual. Installation is an important service provided for the company's customers. Installation policies include procedures for layoffs such as the times when paychecks will be due to laid off personnel. The office manager raises a point, "When a layoff is going to occur, the foreman can cut a deal with the guys about when their checks will be ready." The GM states, "They should never do that, the project manager must deal directly with the union business agent." The office manager

disagrees, "I know someone who cut a deal with his men to give them their checks by the end of the week." The GM asks, "Who was that?" The office manager pauses and then says, " It was someone on the Eastern Job." The GM repeats, "Who?" And the other gives in, "It was Brian Fulton." The GM states in a blameful tone, "He should know better."

In this conversation, the GM reinforces the cultural meaning of blame. He wants to know who performed the aberrant behavior. When he finds out, he implies a negative judgement by saying, "He should know better." In this instance as in others, the GM seeks out mistakes and performs a message of blame. According to reports by office personnel, other company members model the GM's behavior.

Many incidents in the field notes support the hypothesis of the GM's powerful position as creator of corporate culture. I looked also for incidents that contradicted this proposition. One instance of disconfirming data was the general manager's twice-yearly vacation. If he were so crucial to the company, how could he leave for two three-week vacations per year? Scrutiny of the GM's desk and workload answered this question. After he returned from vacation, his desk was piled high with paper work. Many decisions and developments in the company had awaited his return, and he took many weeks to catch up. The apparently disconfirming data, after closer scrutiny, supported the working hypothesis.

In brief, the interpretive report supports the working hypothesis in this study--the GM is the central actor in the creation of corporate culture. We can conclude that as the principal actor, the GM creates: 1) control for himself as the principal decision-maker; 2) a sense of sociability and cohesion within the company; 3) company values such as task orientation and attention to detail;

and 4) shared attitudes toward blame and consequent self-protective behaviors.

The generalizability of these conclusions is limited by the nature of the data collection. Since interviews and observations in the plants were less frequent than in the office, there may be additional themes in the plants that were not reported. Concerning generalization to other companies, these findings support the theses of Siehl (1985) and Pettigrew (1979) that in the entrepreneurial stage of organizational development, the leader of the organization performs a central role in the creation of culture.

Summary of Interpretive Report

This case study accomplishes the major purposes claimed by the proponents of interpretive methodologies: it provides an insightful, detailed, and "thick description" of how people create culture in an organization (Deetz, 1982; Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983; Trujillo, 1985). This is valuable because the interpretive analysis answers questions about how culture is created and evolves. In this case, interpretive accounts illustrate how the GM created culture through specific communicative acts.

This research provided discovery. Five themes and a working hypothesis first were discovered and then corroborated by a variety of interpretive methods. The working hypothesis was that the general manager played the central role in the creation of culture. The five themes are: task orientation, lack of decision-making latitude by office managers, vulnerability in relation to their major customer, lack of clearly defined roles, and an atmosphere of blame.

The interpretive approach can contribute to theoretical knowledge of organizational culture. Any of the themes discovered through the interviews

could generate theory. For example, the theme of blame and consequent self-protective behaviors by personnel could be a variable in organizational communication worthy of additional research. Interpretive discoveries can confirm existing theoretic propositions. The theoretic work by Siehl and Pettigrew on entrepreneurial stages of organizations and the central role of the founder, is confirmed by the data in this study.

Evaluation of the Interpretive Methods

The interpretive data collection, analysis and results in this case study provided practical outcomes. An analogy of high-and low-resolution optical lenses explains the practical differences between interpretive and conventional research methods. Interpretive methods are like a high-resolution lens: they give a close-up and detailed picture of communication and culture. In this study, the interpretive methods directed me to consider a wealth of detail. The interpretive approach encouraged me to look behind the superficial level of meaning and discover some causes of organizational culture--specifically, the role of the GM as creator of culture and the communicative actions that are the process of cultural creation and evolution.

The analogy of a low-resolution lens represents how conventional research methods often capture a whole landscape but with less detail. A comprehensive, "wide angle" view of the company could be achieved by quantitative measures such as questionnaires and network analysis. These more conventional measures add reliability and validity to research that interpretive methods alone do not generate. This validity comes from strict quantitative methodology and by getting input from more of the members of the organization. Conventional methods, such as a questionnaire given to all

company members, could have provided a more comprehensive description of organizational communication and culture in this study.

This interpretive research bridged the gap between social science and humanistic studies. The social-scientific model was used in so far as there was a working hypothesis, methods and analysis that resulted in five themes. A characteristic of social science is its ability to break down complex phenomena into simple models and trends. The five themes derived in this study are an example of such a simplification. On the other hand, the study involved narratives that were literary and experiential. These more literary methods allowed for the expression of details, texture and ambiguity. The hypothesis of the GM as the primary creator of culture is correct. However, the way in which he creates culture is partly ambiguous and contradictory. For example, the GM reinforces the cultural value of egalitarian and nonhierarchical status by behaviors such as using the title, general manager, rather than the title president or CEO. However, he creates a contradictory atmosphere by the use of blame and by trying to control most managerial decision making. The narrative accounts can depict the ambiguity and contradictions in communication.

The interpretive methods make an aesthetic contribution. I hope, that as the readers experience the cultural narratives, they will gain insight into the culture of this company in a deeper way than if they read a list of quantitative research results. Through reading narratives and performances, the imagination of the reader can be dynamically and aesthetically involved in the scenes and emotions that members of the case study organization experience.

In addition to practical effectiveness and aesthetics, there are ethical considerations in the use of interpretive methods in this study. In many

conventional studies, top managers endorse and control the nature of research design, data collection, and research reports. Top management pays consultants to prepare reports that are rhetorically sensitive to the values of the company's leaders. I acquired permission from the GM to use the materials I accumulated on his organization for publication in journals and other writings. However, in this interpretive report, I purposefully avoided "managerial bias," something I do not do in the research results that I submit to his top management team. The relatively nonbiased report raises an important ethical question. Would the GM feel betrayed if he read this report?

This ethical question can be resolved. The research did make valuable contributions to the understanding of this organization. Drawing the research data together and analyzing the data for the interpretive report made me look more closely and critically at the organization's culture than I had previously done. By looking closer, more critically, and with less bias, I gained important knowledge about the cultural forces within the company. The first contribution, then, is an increase in knowledge and insight. The second valuable outcome is an increased ability to help the organization. In other words, deeper knowledge of the culture gained from interpretive methods can be used as a basis for intervention in this organization. Organizational interventions aim to make organizations more effective by developing their cultures. As a consultant, I can remain rhetorically sensitive to top management and use the knowledge I gain to help the organization in honest ways. In other words, I can use the conclusions of the interpretive report to define problems and design interventions and at the same time communicate with the top management in a manner that does not alienate

them. A rhetorically sensitive report to the top management, however, would be stated differently than this paper.

The last contribution of the paper is humanistic. The case-study company represents an important trend in American employment--the tendency toward smaller companies. As time passes, many of the larger companies break up and employ fewer people. The result is that Americans are working for smaller, more entrepreneurial companies. These small companies tend to have the same characteristic as the company in this study--the entrepreneur is the primary creator of culture. Knowledge gained by case studies such as this one can identify problems intrinsic to small companies and provide solutions aimed at making the quality of life better for the many people who work in these organizations.

In conclusion, interpretive methods contribute practical, aesthetic and ethical value to research on organizational culture. The ethical issues in interpretive research can be resolved if researchers remain honest, rhetorically sensitive, and use the results of interpretive research to help the organization. The interpretive methods used in the report have provided details and insight into the culture of this company and how this culture is created. This depth of detail and insight is the unique contribution of interpretive methodologies.

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